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Abstract

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Keywords

system, urban, dublin, influence, power, participation, interests, property, community, planning

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Power and Influence in Urban Planning: Community and Property Interests' Participation in Dublin's Planning System

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ABSTRACT

Using local authority planning in Dublin as a case study, the extent and effectiveness of community and development interests' participation in policy formulation is examined. A primary focus is on the nature and timing of participation as a determinant of the relative influence that each can exert over policy decisions. A critical distinction is drawn between formal and informal participation channels. The vast array of informal channels available to development interests can mean that they have little need to participate formally; thus a primary and secondary layer of influence on policy formulation can be distinguished. The primary layer is largely informal, on-going and pervasive. The secondary layer is formal, controlled and capable only of adapting rather than formulating policy. This supports the existence of an incontestable basis of planning policy that emerges from the primary layer of influence and reflects an inherent acceptance of the legitimacy of development interests' demands. As a consequence, questions are raised about the role of participation within a planning system which functions in support of capital.

Key Index Words: Urban planning, policy formulation, Dublin.

Introduction

This paper contributes to a body of literature that positions urban planning as playing a crucial role within the capitalist state apparatus. This role is (a) to manage the built environment to avert crises in the development process and (b) to ensure social cohesion by creating a land use pattern and urban form that promotes and legitimates current social and property relations (see Blowers, 1980; Freestone, 1981; Knox and Cullen, 1981; Kirk 1982; Fainstein and Fainstein, 1985; Feagin, 1984 and 1990; Harvey, 1989; Healey *et al.*, 1989; Dear, 1990; Fainstein, 1994). While adopting a political economy approach, the paper examines aspects of community and development interests' participation in the planning process that facilitate this role. In the tradition of this theoretical approach, this examination explores the relationship between market

based economies and democratically based politics as they are revealed through participation within the urban planning system. The political economy approach provides a comprehensive framework within which to consider the broad implications of the social power relations reflected within the planning system. Moreover, it provides the conceptual basis for positioning the urban planning process as an integral part of the capitalist state apparatus.

Using local authority urban planning in Dublin as a case study, the paper investigates the extent and effectiveness of community group and development interest input into the formulation of planning policy. Its primary aim is to examine how the nature of participation, the stage at which it occurs, and planners' reactions to it, create distinctive layers of influence with quite different capabilities of affecting policy formulation. The paper's finding that developers' influence is paramount in policy formulation is hardly groundbreaking. More significant is the identification of the mechanisms through which the system of participa-

tion operates to ensure the legitimacy of the planning system while generating policy and practice that serve the long term interests of capital.

By positioning urban planning within its broader political framework, the paper also shows that development interests have a privileged position within the planning system. Little formal participation is required by them to ensure that their interests are accounted for in policy decisions. Their political and economic strength, ready access to political decision makers, and an inherent acceptance of the legitimacy of their demands create an uncontested and unrecognised bias that has become integral to the planning decision making process. In short, their priorities implicitly underscore policy formulation.

Participation in the Urban Planning Process

The official rationale behind public participation is that it is a mechanism for transferring power from government and bureaucracy to the community. The need for participation in urban planning arose from the broader demand for government accountability associated with 1960s radicalism and the decline of the political consensus (Blowers, 1986). Requirements to provide mechanisms for participation were incorporated into the planning legislation of the U.K. (1964) and Ireland (1963). However, though public participation has been espoused in principle, its official interpretation has tended to be narrow and to be prefaced by warnings against expending undue extra time or money on its practice.

The practice of participation can vary from genuine power sharing to ineffective tokenism that serves simply to pass information on to the public on a number of pre-determined policy options (see Arnstein, 1969; Dennis, 1970; Young, 1985). Thornley (1977) has identified a continuum of three approaches to planning participation: radical, liberal and conservative, which create very different contexts for participation. At one extreme of the continuum is the radical approach that aims at making conflict explicit and increasing awareness of unbalanced power relations within planning. Radical theorists view participation in the *status quo* as participation between unequal partners. Inequalities must be dealt with if power is to be equitably shared. So, participation is theorised as a means to alter society's power relations. As radical participation requires delegation of power from the

professional elites who control planning procedures it has received little support from professional planners. There is little likelihood that official planning exercises will espouse it, given the technocratic education and socialisation process that planners undergo (McLoughlin, 1992).

The liberal approach envisages the containment of conflict through bargaining and institutionalisation. Though conflict is not seen as fundamental it is accepted and considered to be manageable through concession. It is mediated through established institutions to create orderly and controlled change. Participation occurs within a set of discrete and limited rules. This is reflected in the view, prevalent among planning professionals, that the only realistic time to involve the public in plan or policy making is after a limited range of options has been clarified (Knox, 1994). The bureaucratic confines within which local authority planners operate tend to favour this model of participation.

At the other extreme of the continuum is the conservative approach which aims at establishing a consensus of values through participation, which maintains social order. Information is exchanged between planners and participants and a chain of feed-back, adaptation, and equilibrium is established. The exercise of participation is seen as a two-way information exchange rather than power-sharing in decision-making. Policy is adapted to public opinion and attitudes rather than being formed by them. Participation allows for the ostensible sharing of authority but, to avoid destabilising the *status quo*, authorities must be confident that issues are innocuous before they enter the participation arena. The aim, Thornley (1977) claims, is to empower a decision-making elite by ensuring their legitimacy. This is achieved through the apparent accountability provided by supplying an improved quality of information to the public about pre-selected (and innocuous) issues. These issues, because they are visible, become the key issues for public discussion.

The Irish legislation of 1963 came equipped with very generous provision for participation, aiming ostensibly at creating a democratic system of accountable decision-making. However, if Thornley's approaches to participation are considered as a continuum, this examination of participation in Dublin's planning system reveals a practice that may be positioned closest to the conservative approach, with notable concessions to a liberal approach. Information exchange and direction of participation into institu-

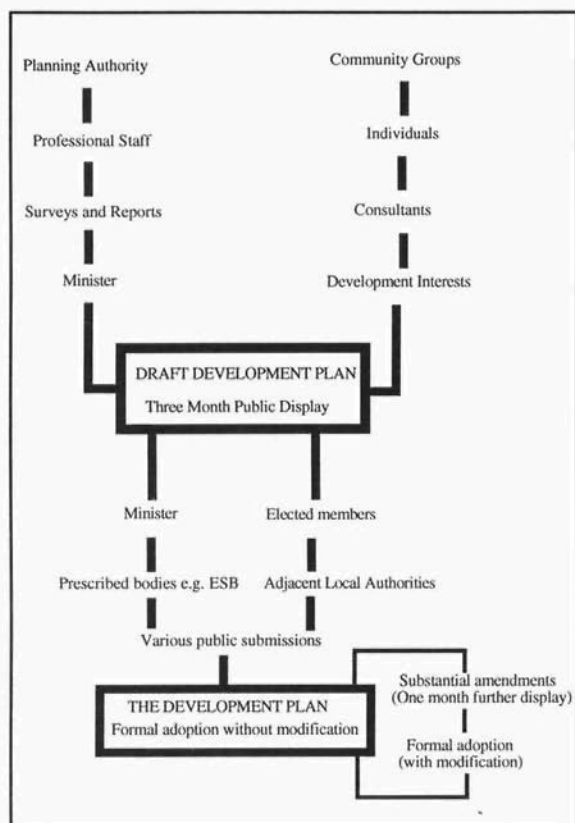


Figure 1: Formulating a Development Plan

tional channels take precedence over power sharing. Planners' belief that the public's best interests are genuinely served by planning's everyday operations creates a tendency for them to accept only marginal suggestions for change that are compatible with their overall plans. The input of development and business interests into policy information is distinguished from that of the community (a) by planners' more positive reaction to their input and (b) by their ease of access to decision-making echelons beyond the planning department, e.g. at ministerial level. This input enters the planning system and decision-making process at an entirely different level to that of the community.

The following discussion elaborates on and demonstrates the validity of the claims made above. For those unfamiliar with the Irish planning system, Figures 1 and 2 outline the policy formulation and development control processes. These figures also clarify the role of the key actors involved in these processes and highlight the formal opportunities for participation by development and community interests.

Sources Used in the Formulation of Planning Policy

Superficially at least, the factor that differentiates between community and development interests' input into the planning policy formulation is their access to the planning department and to other relevant decision-making bodies. The existence of differential levels of access to planners is largely unacknowledged by authorities. No distinction is made between the two interests' input within the formal structures for participation. The failure to recognise this and its impact on resulting planning outcomes ensures that the participation of many community groups will be entirely ineffectual.

A useful starting point in quantifying the impact of development and community interests' input is to identify the sources used by planning officials in the formulation of policy. This also helps to identify and clarify the idea of distinctive layers of influence. Discussion here is based on a series of indepth interviews carried out with Dublin planners, development interests and community groups between 1988 and 1990. Of 30 planners interviewed, 27 were employees of the three local authorities with jurisdiction over the Dublin region and 3 were in private practice. The 23 developers interviewed represented a range of scales from institutional developers to large scale development companies with international interests, to small companies with purely local interests. All were primarily involved in the development of office space. The 29 community groups were chiefly resident action groups based throughout Dublin city, its inner and outer suburbs. However, some umbrella groups such as An Taisce were also included. Responses to interview questions were grouped and are discussed here in terms of percentages who gave particular responses. Thus, categories are not mutually exclusive. Quotations from interviews are identified by a designated code referring to whether the source was a planner (P), developer (D) or community group (C) and to which individual is quoted.

In the development of planning policy there is, of course, a basis of technical information, population projections, statistics and land-use surveys that serves as a basic audit of service and facility needs. However, the majority of planners (62%) specified informal contacts as the major source used in policy formula-

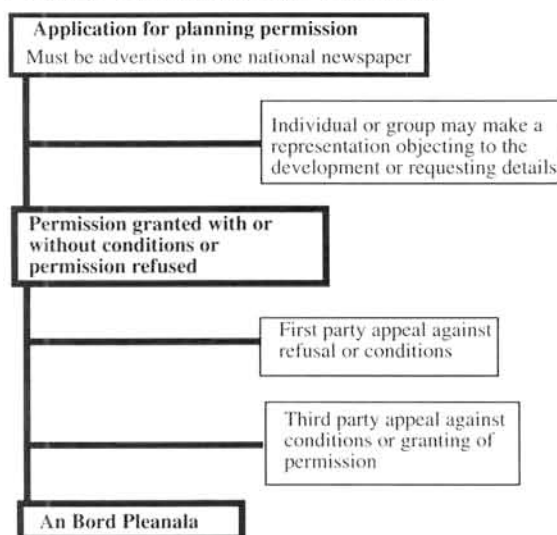


Figure 2: Participation in development control

tion, with 72% of these specifically stressing informal *professional* contact. Less than a quarter (24%) mentioned formal contact with state or semi-state agencies such as the Industrial Development Authority, Dublin Bus or the Department of Education. Little weight appears to be given to contact with community groups at the initial policy formulation stage.

Submissions and the use of councillors were quite strongly emphasised by planners (34% and 31% respectively) as a source at this stage. However, the submissions specified were not from the general public but from interest groups representing development and business interests e.g. the Construction Industry Federation and the Dublin Chamber of Commerce. Only 14% of community groups had used councillors in the attempt to influence initial policy formulation (though fewer than half the groups in total (45%) attempted to become involved at this stage). At this point in the process, councillors appear to be used chiefly to exert informal political pressure on planners on behalf of the development lobby.

The emphasis placed on informal contact, casual meetings, phone calls and letters is very significant. Informal professional contact was the most frequently cited form of contact overall. Such contact is often not specifically aimed at the development plan and related policy but involves the discussion of individual developments. Nonetheless it filters through to have an indirect and vital impact on policy formulation. As one

planner put it, "we do nothing except publicise the plan display. The general requirements of developers are expressed in the weight of planning applications and appeals. Professional contact is largely informal. There is very little formal contact" (P21). Such contact ranges from casual suggestions made about development plan policies at pre-application consultations, to the other extreme described by a representative of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce: "(Planners) are helpful and forthcoming. There is continuous dialogue. We discuss problems and make suggestions. We are often in sync with the planners' views. We have a special viewing of the draft (planning policy) arranged. We don't have to object or appeal. We have a good, first name relationship with the planners" (D1).

Pre-application Consultations

Perhaps the strongest evidence of development interests' informal leverage is found after the policy formulation stage through the use of pre-application consultations. Pre-application consultations between planners and developers, besides being explicitly accommodative of development interests, are a major source used by planners in piecing together the thrust of developers' demands. Though they occur continually and are related to development control not policy, policy is nonetheless clearly influenced by the ongoing feedback they provide.

There was unanimous approval of these consultations among planners and the majority of developers (95%) regularly used them to discuss proposals prior to applying for planning permission. The developers outlined the content of these consultations as a "full and frank discussion" (D4) which is "necessary and valuable, especially regarding cost and time" (D6); "if a developer finds that planners are totally opposed to a development, they will hint as to what is acceptable" (D22). Though rarely explicitly termed 'negotiation', 61% of planners considered the process effectively to be one of negotiation or bargaining; "we ask for 3x expecting 2x. (The developer) offer(s) 1x expecting to give 2x. We split the difference" (P16). The result is that "developers know what would be in the planner's mind before applying, so this helps their success rate" (D22). The process described closely mirrors Simmie and French's (1989) model of corporate participation: a reciprocal relationship in which an understanding based on unwritten rules governs how far

each party can expect to push the other. No respondent referred to the fact that this entire process takes place before any opportunity is provided for public comment. This reflects the planners' view of themselves as acting on behalf of the public interest in such cases.

The accommodation of private sector interests through pre-application consultations is clearly accepted within the planning profession rather than being problematised, or even acknowledged, as the accommodation of a vested interest. This is ingrained in decision-making agencies at both central and local government level making it unnecessary for these interests to be forcefully asserted at the policy-making stage (Short *et al.*, 1986). The vast majority of developers (74%) agreed that they could influence development policy. As one developer suggested, "slowly, by constantly requiring the same thing we can put our demands across" (D2); "by going to the planning department and making clear what our needs are, planners get to know" (D1). Though development interests express these views in pre-application consultations in an individual capacity, their impact on planning authorities tends to be felt as a unified lobby. A clearly defined and identifiable 'developers' interest' exists, by virtue of their common interests, which tends to be more uniform than the diverse and parochial concerns of community groups (Girling, 1982; Grist, 1983). Their demands are shaped by conditions in the market. The expectation that this will be built into planning policy is continually reinforced among planning officials through numerous other channels also; local representatives, politicians, lobbying by the Construction Industry Federation, the Construction Industry Development Board, and bodies representing commercial interests (City Centre Business Association, Chamber of Commerce etc).

The Strategic Importance of Development Interests

Development interests hold a strategically vital position in development planning and policy. Without their proposing development in accordance with policy guidelines, planners have no means of policy implementation. Reflecting this, 79% of planners believed that they could not implement policies promoting development of a type, or in a location, that departed from the logic of the market; "we can offer till we are blue in the face but we have to wait until the developer

wants to. We can create the climate but the market decides. There is nothing in normal planning controls that can force the market" (P1). Failure to produce a development plan in line with market criteria may result in developers simply not implementing any policies that are not agreed with; "developers have influence by simply not developing if it does not suit, so the planners get nothing done" (D6).

Theoretically, the developers' strategic position does not affect which policies are formulated, but its influence on which policies can actually be implemented is absolute. As one developer put it, "obviously, developers and business interests will be more influential. We are consulted and listened to. We usually back planners' opinions. We don't take the narrow view of residents' associations. We are the only ones paying rates. This has an effect on what planners listen to" (D1). Public participation is demoted in importance as, obviously, the 'general public' plays little role in implementing planning policy despite living with its outcomes. Because of their strategic economic importance development interests effectively, if indirectly, come close to being collaborative decision-makers on policy formulation. This position is ensured through informal, on-going communication allowing developers to keep in touch with prevailing attitudes in the planning authority and to tailor their dealings accordingly. Business interests are not so much expressed as anticipated (Knox, 1994), so their influence is obscured. Policy is clearly conditioned by the political context in which it is set, the strategic importance of developers' investment capital and the need to adhere to certain imperatives of capitalism (Healey *et al.*, 1989). An informal atmosphere promoting a pro-development ethos is created and can prove difficult to resist. Although this atmosphere is not explicit it nevertheless infiltrates the entire planning system. As one planner outlined: "there is a web of influence and power which is very difficult to break through. An environment for a decision is made which makes it difficult for any other decision than the desired one to be reached. A planning consultant makes a submission for the client and gets in touch with the minister, who contacts the manager, who contacts the senior administrator and the technical staff. If everyone is saying the same thing, including the councillors, this creates the environment. It is an informal ready-up. There is nothing necessarily malicious nor is there personal gain. It is a contextual thing. There is nobody there to

put forward an alternative except the planner, who is isolated. These informal ways never get into the public light. There are informal linkages leading to the desired decision. It is a power game in which you cannot put forward a successful alternative. Planning tries to raise other issues but never can" (P20).

This atmosphere is maintained by the strategic importance of development interests and is fuelled by the informal contact network available to developers. A variety of channels of communication, political connections and a knowledge of the system often facilitated by the use of private planning consultants, allows development interests to sustain their privileged position. Simmie and French (1989) identified a 'permanent liaison' between planning departments and corporatist interests, allowing them regular and unrestricted access to key planning officials. They stressed informal contacts as the most important means of mediating corporate interests. Community interests rarely have such channels of communication open to them, nor can they easily afford to engage the expertise of professional planning consultants.

The Incontestable Basis of Policy

The privileged position of development interests is reflected in the fact that 65% of developers did not attempt to influence the development plan or policies before its publication. This initial stage is the stage at which suggestions and submissions are most likely to be assimilated in a manner that could be formative to policy rather than simply influencing subsequent adaptation of policy options. Development interests' lack of involvement at this stage initially appears to be contradictory until the question is raised of whether they need to participate formally at this stage at all to ensure that their interests are considered. The range and frequency of informal contact ensures that their interests are in-built in the decision-making process. Healey *et al.* (1989) assert that the needs of development are anticipated in draft policies put forward for consideration in a development plan. This is the 'pre-politics processing' of policy options (Roweis, 1981). Public debate around these policies, and potential change, can only take place within the bounds of the original policies forwarded by the planning department. An 'incontestable basis' (Healey *et al.*, 1989) accounting for the needs of the development industry is automatically written into policies and included in

decision-making criteria, ensuring that continued advantage is conferred on capital. Certain options that do not accord with dominant priorities are thus excluded early on (Dunleavy, 1980; Young 1985). Public inputs are only seriously considered after this process has occurred, ensuring that debate is confined to innocuous issues that do not question the legitimacy of development interests. Though the policy package may be altered, the contents remain substantially unchanged. There is an underlying value consensus within (and beyond) the planning department which seeks to promote, facilitate and not unduly restrict development. This also means that accepting the general thrust (if not the specifics) of development interests demands is perceived as a neutral rather than an explicitly political stance.

The large majority of developers (74%) had attempted to have some input into development policies after the draft review had been published. Nearly half of these (48%) stressed professional contact again as the major opportunity for doing so; "formal and informal letters and chats, ... professional contacts and phone calls" (D2). These informal chats are doubly facilitated by planners' willingness to incorporate them and by developers' use of professional planning expertise in addressing planning issues.

Thus, an accumulation of effective forms of input by or on behalf of development interest can be identified. These sources are largely informal and exist at various stages in the planning process yet, combined, they create persuasive feedback to the policy formulation stage. This constitutes the primary layer of influence. The input of the community constitutes a secondary layer of influence that is superimposed upon the policy basis emerging from the pre-existing and continuous inputs of the primary layer. The lack of clarity about who controls decisions and resources and about the location of power allows those interests with professional and political knowledge to dominate. Simultaneously it obscures the process that produces this bias and so maintains legitimacy. The end result is that developers' interests can become the non-negotiable basis of local authority policy, so they do not need to be strongly reasserted at public forums when the stage of open public participation arrives.

There is strong evidence that these power relations are reinforced through informal pro-development political pressure, placed on the planning department by politicians at every level from the ministerial to the

local. This was acknowledged as being influential by 80% of planners, 70% of developers and 85% of community groups (for further discussion, see McGuirk, 1994). In a practice which is theoretically neutral and carried out at a local level, pro-development political influence limits the effectiveness of community participation. There is no equivalent source of political lobbying that can address the diffuse and variable demands and interests of 'the community' or the 'public interest': both ill-defined terms that obscure as much as they reveal.

Community Groups' Involvement in Policy Matters

A comparison with community groups' involvement in policy matters highlights how their experience differs from that of development interests. A surprisingly high proportion of groups had attempted to participate in policy formulation (57%). However, what was classified as an attempt to influence policy may simply mean a letter submitted to the planning department complaining about a specific problem in the locality rather than addressing a problem in the published policy review document. Later discussion indicates that such submissions tend to be left aside, considered to be too parochial to be relevant to policy issues. Revealingly, 79% of community groups had never been in direct contact with planning officials to discuss policy prior to the publication of a draft policy review. Most were unaware of the review until the draft's publication. More than half (55%) had never been in contact on policy matters even after its publication.

Significantly, when planners were asked to rank various actors in terms of their influence on policy formulation, 'development interests' and 'business interests' both received mean ranks above those given to either 'the public' or to 'residents' and tenants' associations' reflecting the effectiveness of informal contact (Figure 3). The mean score awarded to 'the public' was above that only of 'academics', giving some indication of the weakness of public input at this stage.

The planners pointed out that the high score awarded to council members related to their ability to veto the plan and its policies. More light can be shed on their apparent role if community groups' perspectives on



Figure 3: Average rank of perceived influences on plan formation

how exactly councillors are useful to them is examined. In total, 90% of community groups had utilised councillors at some stage in their participation, though this was chiefly when dealing with a specific development application. Komito (1983) has questioned the representativeness of councillors in Ireland and is supported by a vast international literature raising similar doubts (Dennis, 1972; Rakove, 1975; Newton, 1976; Young 1985; Short *et al.* 1986; Hampton, 1987). Moreover, only 14% of community groups had used councillors at the critical initial stages of policy formulation. The key role that they play for community groups is merely one of facilitating access to the planning department and extracting information otherwise difficult to obtain; "(we use them) to get infor-

mation planners are reluctant to give..." (C31), "they get information the Corporation won't give us" (C5), "they're invaluable in knowing what door to approach" (C14), "we only got a meeting after three letters were ignored. Then (the local T.D. and councillor) got us one within ten minutes" (C28). Many of the groups liked to have backing and advice from a councillor or T.D. on approaching the planning department; "all things are easier with a councillor. They found the right route for us to take. They got us to apply to departments we didn't even know existed" (C17). Most groups did not refer to the outcome of participation mediated by a councillor but seemed satisfied once contact with the planning department was achieved. This illustrates the therapeutic effect of participation (Cullen, 1980). If a situation satisfies people, social harmony is maintained regardless of whether concrete change is achieved (Reade, 1987). This 'therapy' can diffuse and channel dissatisfaction into less threatening modes by offering a certain amount of restricted contact with planning officials. Once contact is established, groups become wary of endangering it. Expectations become confined to the definition of what is possible, which in turn shapes community groups' activities (Newton, 1976; Kirk, 1980).

The stage at which community participation takes place, and the attention paid to it, are vital concerns in the analysis of policy formulation. Understanding the timing and treatment of public input compared to that of development interests reveals the legitimising function of public participation. It also further exposes how an incontestable policy basis is formed subject only to marginal public scrutiny.

Planners' Contact with the General Public

The restriction of community policy input is far from a simple matter of the community's lack of strategic positioning. The timing of their input and how planners then address their input both play important roles in confining them to the secondary layer. Moreover, most community groups concentrate their efforts on dealing with specific localised problems, not with policy issues (Grist, 1983) (Figure 4). This results from a combination of factors related to the perceived abstract nature of strategic planning, the difficulty of sustaining community interest in planning policies whose impacts are neither immediate nor obvious, perceptions of powerlessness in addressing some of

the 'bigger' structural issues of the planning system and the tendency to defend a community's own 'turf', letting other communities do likewise.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that early involvement in policy formulation is rare. Meeting with residents' associations' representatives *after* publication of the policy document was mentioned by 46% of planners as the primary source of contact with the public. These meetings aspire to explain policies, present information about their aims and get feedback: usually an immediate gauging of public reaction. Although these formal meetings took place at too late a stage for formative and positive input into policy, they seem to defuse demand for public input quite successfully. As one planner put it "there is ... a sense of the general confession about it. It is therapeutic. We go through their worries with them and they have a name for the faces they see" (P6). Another called it an "opportunity for them to let off steam" (P5) which he claimed has a defusing effect. The value of these meetings lies more in their 'safety valve' role than in their contribution to meaningful participation. They can end up being what one planner called "explanatory seminars" (P10). Nevertheless, the public demand for a voice is met as the majority of groups concern

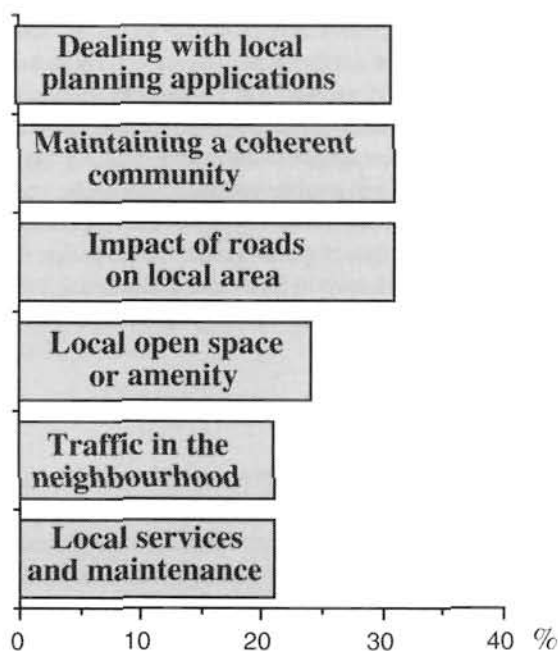


Figure 4: Major concerns identified by community groups

themselves not with policy issues but with more localised place-based issues. The essential purpose of legitimisation is served - the planning system is justified by appearing to serve the public (Thomas, 1976; Katz, 1989; Burns, 1990; Fainstein, 1990).

Furthermore, one third of planners (31%) listed objections, appeals, or oral hearings as the main source of contact with the public. All of these relate to specific developments and have no immediate impact upon policy formulation. Because they occur at an advanced stage in the planning process (Figure 2) the nature of public participation is shaped into negative objecting rather than constructive contribution to planning matters. The timing of opportunities for participation, the formal nature of these opportunities and the enforced negative stance they impose on community groups shapes planners' attitudes towards their input and confines them to a secondary layer of influence.

Given the lack of opportunities for informal contact with planners, community groups rely on formal contact. Using these channels of communication requires them to adopt certain forms of articulation that demand what Dearlove (1973) defined as middle class skills. These formal channels set the agenda and determine the parameters of what can be discussed by presenting pre-set policy options. They determine what is negotiable and what constitutes a problem. Planners' own interpretation of what the public wants is imposed on public feedback (Fagence, 1977). Resulting adaptation to policy is mediated through established institutions. Concessions granted are yielded along lines defined by planners' interpretations. Ultimately, conflict is managed to create orderly and controlled change within pre-established parameters. Participation of this nature can clearly be positioned along the continuum between Thornley's conservative and liberal approaches.

Planners' Perceptions of Public Participation

Planners' attitudes towards public participation are important because they determine the extent to which public input will be taken into account. In general, attitudes were not positive. Members of the public were referred to as "request machines" (P1), and as "pests" (P15) who tend to "mix everything and every department up" (P3), "they expect planning to influence what it cannot. They are not aware of what a planner does or can do" (P4). Almost three-fifths of the

planners (57%) referred to problems of the public being uninterested and/or being unable to understand issues involved with general policy, though one planner conceded that "(planners) are expert enough to make (planning) complex enough for the average person not to understand" (P24). There is a marked proclivity to use 'competence' as the criterion to merit participation. Planners' belief that the public is uninformed about planning issues, unaware of how the system works and uninterested in its wider implications, is a crucial influence on how they react to public involvement (Fagence, 1977; Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987). These beliefs mean that contact between the two becomes what one planner called "an information gathering exercise with no real exchange of information" (P1). Residents' Associations were referred to as "people with their own ideas for what they need in an area and no wider idea of how things have to develop for a city to keep working" (P1); "they do not give views that help in the formulation of policy" (P10), "most only perceive their own patch" (P15). Many groups are not motivated to participate until the implications of a policy begin to have effects on their neighbourhoods. It is in the nature of area based community groups to be primarily interested in matters viewed as parochial by policy makers. The use-values they apply to their localities are at odds with the exchange-values applied by capital. Places of value to local communities as their 'turf' are not part of the conventional concept of commodity applied to place as 'space' by developers (Molotch and Logan, 1987). The predominantly local focus places community groups in an inferior position in any conflict with planners and developers. This is due on the one hand to the dominant criteria of development interests, and on the other hand to planners' limited approach to participation.

Adaptation to policy sought on the basis of 'parochial' concerns are neither orderly nor controlled and therefore are at odds with a conservative/liberal approach to public participation. As a result, participants' views are taken into account, as legislation demands they must be, but then subsumed and lost within the broader policy directions of the 'public interest'. Planners have perceived themselves to represent a consensual public interest that can surpass the array of divisive, sectional and parochial interests of the community at large; "we live in the city do we not. We see the problems. Anyone making representations

has a particular interest to push. They do not have a balanced view. Planners know what is going on from day to day contact" (P19). As one planner frankly stated; "we are employed to do the job for the public. (Participation) is like buying a dog and barking yourself" (P19). The community is clearly made up of a variety of conflicting interests and class positions, some of which are irreconcilable. There is no 'general public' but a series of public, sectional interests, and social strata, some of which have influence and power and some of which are isolated and fragmentary. Such a 'public interest' approach collapses public diversity of opinion and attempts to contain it within manageable categories. Public proposals can be redefined on planners' terms and non-conforming aspects can be by-passed. Planners decide how much time to allot to the official channels of participation, whether to ignore the opinions presented, and how to balance them against the opinions of development and business interests, without whom the authority's plans will not be implemented. Community input is channelled through formal conduits that are thoroughly managed and do not compare with development interests' informal but effective leverage.

Problems such as these reflect poorly on community groups' chances of meaningful participation and broaden the gulf between the primary and secondary layers of influence. This is a function of the pluralist notion upon which planning is founded (Dear and Clark, 1981b). This notion promotes the treatment of all groups as if they had an equal voice and fails to recognise varying degrees of access to decision-making forums in planning (Long, 1975; Simmie, 1985; Duncan *et al.*, 1988). Once the opportunity for participation is provided, it is assumed that development interests and community groups are equally enabled to voice their opinion and make themselves heard. While the planning system may be overtly pluralist, the assumed pluralist politics, open and equitable debate is simply not the basis on which planning participation operates. Common pluralist assumptions fail to recognise that the economic power base extends to affect the control of and access to the political power base. Nevertheless, when asked whether the varying resources available to groups made a difference to their ability to participate effectively, 93% of the planners acknowledged that it did. Thirty nine per cent recognised the importance of engaging professional help if

attempting to oppose a development proposal; "developers will employ professionals. If people want to oppose development they will normally need to employ professional expertise" (P18). Indeed, the fact that 93% of community groups had utilised professional help in their dealings with the planning department suggests that they too are very well aware of their importance; "we just wouldn't be able to do it without professional help. On an appeal particularly, it's absolutely vital. We just couldn't afford what a developer can. You feel you just don't make an impression. When your group is run just on voluntary effort you get tired" (C32), "help is vital, we couldn't manage without it. Planners just sleep if (our input) is not in their language. They perk up once they hear professional language" (C32). It follows that a simple increase in the opportunity to participate through existing means does not equalise rates of participation across community groups (Verba and Nie, 1972). Many groups struggle to meet the standard of input demanded to be effective; many others are simply discouraged entirely from participating.

Despite planners' recognition of the uneven nature of community input, only two of those interviewed recognised that this unevenness meant that planners' perception of community demands must be unrepresentative. The belief that planners speak for the public interest appears to obscure this connection for most planners. So, their perception of community demands is based on feedback gained from partial public participation. This feedback is interpreted according to the pre-conceived notions and values of planners, and applied to a set of policy options that are already determined according to the long term interests of development capital. The notion of an incontestable basis underlying policy formation is never problematised.

Conclusion

By examining the policy making stages of the planning process it becomes apparent that there are distinctive layers of influence that impinge to different extents on shaping policy. The examination of Dublin's case suggests the existence of distinctive channels through which this influence is transmitted; some formal and restricted to more manageable stages, some informal and on-going with a more pervasive influ-

ence. The primary layer is dominated by economically and politically strong development and business interests. This stems from informal, continuous input and is supported by an implicit acceptance of the legitimacy of facilitating development. To a considerable extent the existence of this layer negates the need for these interests to utilise formal participatory channels. The need to facilitate the requirements of development interests at policy level is intensified by current economic circumstances and, in Dublin's case, the urgent need to attract development investment (McGuirk, 1994). This layer of influence is crucial in shaping the ultimate parameters of policy options. It is decisive in producing policy's incontestable basis which determines the climate for specific decision-making. Such a policy and decision-making climate is ultimately reified in urban form.

The secondary layer, which applies to community influence, is transmitted through formal channels and confined to dealing with a pre-determined set of options. Scope for adaptation of policy exists within this set but the opportunity to influence basic policy thrusts, determined within the primary layer of influence, is foregone. Community groups are involved at a stage and in a manner that confines their influence to the secondary layer. Such participation amounts to what Thornley (1977) has identified as a conservative approach which ensures a bias in the information received by planning authorities, and in the manner in which that information is incorporated (Healey *et al.*, 1989). Combined with planners' assumed role as defenders of the public interest, this allows the priorities

of development interests with access to the primary layer to permeate and to persist in emerging policy. These priorities remain unchallenged as the political tensions that arise from the conflict between use value and exchange value ('space' as commodity and 'place' as locality) is diverted into the unthreatening and more orderly channels of formal participation at later stages in the planning process (Fincher, 1981). The persistent failure of planners to recognise the incontestable basis and the pluralist assumptions underlying community participation ensures that it remains unchallenged. Though the contribution of public participation to the production of democratic plans is a primary source of legitimacy for planning (McAuslan, 1980; Ravetz, 1980; Dear 1986), community impact on the fundamental premises of policy matters remains largely peripheral. Thus legitimised, urban planning outcomes continue to play a critical role within the state apparatus. Potential crises emanating from the (il)logic of the development process are averted and the current configuration of property relations is sustained and legitimised. When urban planning is analysed from a political economy stance which positions it within the framework of capitalist economic and political structures, the limits to participation and the purpose served by its limitation are crystallised.

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